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ABSTRACT

It is argued that folklore can and should have a primary place in curriculum for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Folklore has the following advantages--it: is a form of literature in which language, arts, and culture intersect; fosters understanding and acceptance of the foreign language and culture; can be exploited at all learning levels and ages for varied purposes; integrates cognitive tasks, language skills, and learning strategies; and complements current language teaching methodology and theory. It is noted that stories, both folk tales and personal experience stories, are the original teaching materials. The text of a jump story is included. Songs helpful in language teaching include didactic, pop, and folk songs. A song-leading lesson plan is presented. Folk speech (riddles and jokes, proverbs and slang, rhymes and wordplay) activities are suggested, including exercises in collecting, sharing, and completing language forms. A split-proverb exercise is detailed. Finally, possible classroom activities using folklore for development of each language skill (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and creativity are listed. Separate bibliographies for storytelling, folk song, and folk speech are appended. (MSE)

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ED 372 629

Folklore in ESL/EFL Curriculum Materials

E. Martin Pedersen

This paper is a discussion of the use, in English teaching, of *verbal folklore*--folk tales, folk songs, and folk speech, including jokes, proverbs, rhymes, and so on. It also includes a *demonstration* of storytelling, song-leading, and folk speech activities. My intention is to convince the reader that folklore *can and should* have a primary place in curriculum materials for learning English as a second or foreign language.

Folklore is interdisciplinary--an intersection between the fields of language, the arts, and culture. It is a form of literature; and like literature, it is *both* a separate subject to be studied and raw language material to be utilized in English learning.

Folklore fosters understanding and acceptance of the foreign language and culture and underlines their interconnections. A learner of English should be exposed to the basic cultural traditions that belong to English-speakers: roses are red--violets are blue, why did the chicken cross the road? Yankee Doodle went to town, John Henry and the steam drill, and so on.

Folklore is elastic. It can be exploited at all learning-levels and ages for a wide variety of purposes. Beginning learners, will concentrate on the comprehension and reproduction of the simpler lyric songs and rhymes. Intermediate-level learners can explore the content of ballads and stories and begin collecting and sharing folklore--riddling and joking, for instance. Advanced learners will be interested in telling their own stories, in gathering slang, in discussing proverb truths, and in studying song backgrounds. Folklore works well with large groups (especially songs), small groups (especially stories), and individual learners (especially folk speech). In the lesson, folklore can have many roles: as an introduction, as a break, as an example, as a supplement, as support material for the teaching points, or as the core element for an entire unit.

Folklore is comprehensive. Through singing, storytelling, and folk speech activities, folklore integrates all the cognitive tasks, language skills, and learning strategies, for example: observing, identifying opinion, recognizing imagery, sequencing, discriminating and pronouncing sounds, exploring cause and effect, anticipating, synthesizing, generalizing, brainstorming, classifying, comparing and contrasting, interpreting facts, analyzing, problem-solving, and evaluating. Retention is excellent with songs, rhymes, etc., because of their melody, rhythm, story-line, and repetition. Folk materials promote fluency through the highly effective model-imitation approach to the realistic, meaningful content. Folklore personalizes and enriches the language with all its colorful connotations that go far beyond sterile textbook English.

Folklore is timely. Although it is ages old, it is up to date with current ELT methodology and theory. Stories, speech and songs are basic to the communicative approach, favoring fluency over accuracy, and real language over edited English. A cultural content-based ESL or EFL program would be incomplete without folklore.

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However, folklore is not *always* suitable; it is not a part of individualized or computer-assisted instruction, for example. Folklore is not an educational panacea; but at the very least it can provide an exciting, language-rich break from the routine; at the most an entire course can be built around its various forms.

Stories are the original teaching materials. In some societies they are still the *only* teaching materials. Whatever new methods and techniques come and go, a simple narrative will always be the cornerstone of education. Stories can be divided into three types: folk tales, literary tales, and personal experience stories.

Folk tales are oral literature, the oldest form of literature, and a prime source of language: epic poetry, hero sagas, myths, legends, fairy tales, fables, ghost stories, tall tales, yarns, and many more. These stories blend reality and fantasy through the repetition of simple language and story patterns. In traditional tales the common people express their values, fears, and dreams over generations. A folk tale *exists to be told* in the traditional oral style.

Literary storybooks have been written for centuries by the world's greatest authors and story collectors: the Grimms, Andersen, Hawthorne, Kipling, etc. Some are based on tradition but all have a highly polished, literary style of language. Experts disagree about the value of a dramatic story reading as opposed to a story-telling. Most consider it an inferior exercise because the story's improvised oral qualities are lost, the language is unnatural, and much of the dramatic effect is lacking. Storybooks tie the silent reader to the author, but, in a sense, separate the oral reader from the listening audience.

Personal experience stories are the most common type of narrative; from telling about what happened yesterday to old family stories of lost love and escape from death to the scholastic classic, "How I Spent My Summer Vacation." These are easily told and easily forgotten, unpolished and often poorly structured. They are usually brand new stories with no cultural or literary background; they haven't passed the tests of time or public approval as have folk tales.

Storytelling is a performance art, the original form of drama, the oldest art form. Every storyteller tells stories differently and a story is different every time it's told. The teller's building materials are words, sounds, language patterns; the tools are the voice, the face, the hands, the storytelling craft; the product is the mutual creation of a special human experience, of a world based on words and imagination. The teacher need not be afraid of storytelling because most teachers are fine natural storytellers even without realizing it and beginners can tell as effectively as experts.

Choose stories that you like, to which you have a positive first reaction, and that you feel you can tell. Find stories that your learners will like also, that match their age and language level, and then look for the possible teaching points. Don't memorize stories but note unusual expressions, word patterns, dialogue, emphasis, and themes. Try to create rich setting and character descriptions, but be comfortable with your own use of language. Visualize the succession of scenes as you master the structure of the story. Prepare skeleton outlines on cue cards--an aid in preparation and storage of

tales, but not used in the actual telling.

Storytelling Demonstration: The Hairy Man's Toe (transcription)

Now, let me tell you a jump story. And you be prepared to jump now at the end.

It's a story 'bout a boy, lived on a farm with his ma and pa, poor family. This year in particular, hadn't had much to eat. He was out hoeing in the field, you know, cuttin' weeds, just thinking about it, you know, just tryin' to remember the last time they'd had a little meat around the house. It must have been, oh . . . three months.

Well, so he raises up that hoe all the way and - WHACK! It comes down hard and he hit somethin'. There was this kind of squealin', screechin' noise and a whole bunch of rumblin' and bouncin' around there in the ground, dust flyin' and all kinds of stuff. He just stood there, didn't know what was happenin'. Looked down there an' saw somethin' on the ground, picked it up. Ohhhh Lord!

It was a big old, ugly, bloody, dirty hairy Toe! Whew, just disgusting. And the boy, y'know, he didn't need to think very much about that. He took off runnin' all the way home, but before he did, he did what any self-respecting boy in the world would do with such a horrible, awful thing. He stuck it in his pocket!

He ran like crazy all the way home. And as he's runnin' across the fields he's thinkin', "That's the Hairy Man's toe." The Hairy Man, you know, that's this big old monster, covered with hair and mud, red beady eyes and long fangs with green snot dripping off of 'em, lives under the ground in the daytime and then comes out at night lookin' for something--or someone--to eat.

So the boy gets home all outa breath and his ma is just sorta startin' to get dinner ready. She's stirrin' up some of that thin soup that they were havin' in those days. Mighty thin. So he got ready for supper but, well ... His ma went out of the room there for a second and he was thinkin' about that soup and, uh, thinkin' about that toe . . . and uh . . . He reached in his pocket . . . and uh . . . He walked over there to that big pot on the fire and . . . PLOP! that toe goes into the soup. And then he sat down for dinner, y'know, knife and fork all ready. And he's waitin', hopin'. Sure 'nough, Pa gets in, his Ma's dishin' up the soup and nobody's lookin' and all of a sudden . . . PLOP! into his plate goes that hairy toe. Gobblegobblegobblegobblegobblegobble! Ah, he ate that thing up so fast nobody could see that. Hhhhh, wasn't bad either.

Well, after dinner, y'know, they went to bed like in the old days: whole family slept in the same room. But for some reason they couldn't sleep and along about midnight they started to hear a sorta howlin' outside. Whooo-o-o-o-oo. His ma says, "Ah, Pa, that is the wind, isn't it?" And Pa says, "Oh yeah Ma, I'd, I'd say it is." It's gettin' closer though. Whooo-go-mo-hooy-to. That boy was thinkin', "That is not the wind." It's gettin' closer, they can hear the feet trompin' across the field. Whooo's got my hairrry tooooe? Comin' right up to the house. It's gettin' real close now. His ma's in bed shaaaakin' like a leaf. His pa's layin' there shaaaaaakin'. That little boy was layin' in bed, he was so scared he couldn't shake--frozen stiff--just layin' there listenin' to the Hairy Man right outside the window. He's comin' up, scratchin' on the glass, and the

boy thought, "I locked that window, didn't I? No I didn't!" And in fact he didn't, the Hairy Man just raises up the window and he steps right into the bedroom. Right in, they can hear his feet on the floorboards, and he's comin' right across the room, yellin', "WHO'S GOT MY HAIRY TOE??" He comes past the ma and pa and right over by the boy's bed, "WHO'S GOT MY HAIRY TOOOOE!!!" Oh Gosh, he can smell his breath right above him, "WHO'S GOT MY HAIRY TOE??!!"

"YOU'VE GOT IT!!!"

Another story activity is listening to recordings by professional storytellers or actors. These will help the teacher learn stories and storytelling technique and will be an interesting, different listening experience, but they cannot substitute the magic atmosphere of a live performance.

After a folk tale no follow-up is necessary, stories are valuable in their own right. If a story is followed immediately by a barrage of comprehension questions the artistic value is lost and storytelling suffers. I would suggest waiting a while, maybe a day, to ask the usual who, what, where, when, why, and how.

Songs are poetry, music, literature, history, recreation. Those helpful in language teaching can be grouped into three types: didactic songs, pop songs, and folk songs.

Didactic songs are written (often copying the style of folk songs) by course designers, not songwriters, for a specific language level and teaching purpose. This is both their strength and their weakness! With titles such as: "I Want a Book, Please," "Monday to Friday," or the classic "Alphabet Song," these are songs only in a superficial sense; really they are language tasks set to music--pre-chosen, pre-graded, vocabulary-controlled, activity-connected. Like all other language exercises, didactic songs can be beneficial if used properly, but the language of the texts may be contrived; and they have no art, no history, no human quality--in other words, language in a vacuum!

Pop songs, including rock, rap, country, and so on (many of which are the musical descendants of folk songs), are music-business products. The best songwriters are writing beautiful and well-loved songs, but at the same time many cynical hacks are producing trash for profit. Pop songs afford the possibility (if you pick the right song) of tying the language lesson into something important in the learners' own lives, a chance for maximum involvement--pop songs are popular because they speak the language of youth! On the other hand, pop music, especially hard rock, has been harshly criticized by educators and parents as inspiring false values and promoting anti-social or dangerous behavior. We may not agree but the issue of questionable content cannot be ignored. Besides this, pop singers distort their pronunciation for effect so it is often difficult or impossible to understand the words--lyrics that are often unworthy of close study. Some pop songs are definitely not singable in a classroom without the complex musical arrangement that makes them so pleasant to listen to.

Folk songs are a sort of national self-portrait that reveals a people's deepest feelings and concerns as well as describing their day-to-day lives. Made up spontaneously to satisfy the musical needs of a social group, folk songs tell stories in authentic vernacular speech. A folk song rarely goes out of style but deepens in beauty and significance as it ages. Being non-commercial, folk songs may be unfamiliar or a bit difficult to find (they're not on Top-40 radio, on MTV, at Tower records). But these are not serious obstacles; they are available (see address list); they have an easily approachable timeless appeal; and such a variety exists (the Library of Congress has over 40,000) that some kind of folk song will appeal to everyone. Folk songs have a simple, serviceable style and include song-types that seem tailor-made for language learning: action songs, game songs, rounds, part songs, story songs, add-on songs, dialogue songs, answer-back songs, and more.

Song-leading is an enthusiastic, natural demonstration. An African proverb goes, "If you can walk you can dance, if you can talk you can sing." Song-leading means giving an example, not a performance--the emphasis is not on vocal quality. In fact, rough natural voices are perhaps best for leading singing--the reasoning being "if she/he can do it, then so can I."

Song-leading Demonstration: Old Texas (lesson plan for intermediate level)

Objectives: to learn the words from a purely oral presentation through the echo method; to memorize the song; to learn the new vocabulary; to discuss the decline of the cowboy culture as presented in the song; to study the history of the cowboy.

From about 1860 to 1890 the cowboys gathered wild cattle from south Texas and took them north across the prairie to the railheads in Kansas and elsewhere to be shipped to the cities in the East. As the plains filled with farmers attracted by cheap land the cowboys had to quit these long cattle drives. They had no other skills and when the era of the cowboy ended in America it was almost as if they disappeared. This song expresses the feelings of loss that the cowboy felt when he could no longer practice his profession and was forced to roam. It could be the core of an entire unit on the cowboy in western U.S. history.

lyrics:
I'm going to leave
Old Texas now,
They've got no use
For the long-horned cow.

They've plowed and fenced
My cattle range
And the people there
Are all so strange.

I'll take my horse
I'll take my rope
And hit the trail
Upon a lope.

Say "Adios"
To the cattle range
And turn my head
Toward Mexico. (repeat first verse)

step 1 - tell something of the story of the cowboy and their decline.
step 2 - explain the echo method or play a recording that demonstrates it (Riders in the Sky Saddle Pals on Rounder Records), and tell the song's mood.
step 3 - discuss the new vocabulary (to have no use for, long-horn cow, to plow and fence, to hit the trail, upon a lope) and discuss meanings (who are "they"? why are the people strange? what do the rope and horse symbolize? why lope? why go to Mexico?).
step 4 - sing together with the teacher leading.
step 5 - sing in two groups alternating the lead.
step 6 - as a class discuss the history and feelings expressed in the song.

follow-up: Study the geography of the American plains and the cattle trails.
Write a group or individual research paper on the cowboys (for example, myth vs. reality)
Give an oral report on the cowboys.
Do a creative writing exercise related to the topic (for example, a cowboy's letter home)
Read a story about the cowboys.
Write a parody of the song.
Record the class singing the song.

Though it is more exciting and encouraging to learn a song from a live singer, songs can be learned and led using recordings. Recordings are, however, not a crutch to be used to cover the teacher's shyness and alternatives should be considered: the employment of outside performers (ideal for the interpretation of the song); asking another teacher to act as song-leader (the music teacher would be great); having a group of students or a single student lead the singing. There are no excuses for silence.

The result of a regular singing program will be the filling of the learner's personal songbag, the class's collective songbag, and the teacher's professional songbag--all of which they will carry with them for years.

Folk speech is play with language. It is most often humorous, creative, lively,

and constantly changing. It comes from all age groups, ethnic groups, occupational groups, and regions. To illustrate the nature of folk speech I have divided it into three categories: riddles and jokes, proverbs and slang, rhymes and wordplay.

Riddles come in two main types: **true riddles**, which are guessing games that test the intellect in figuring out the answer, *["What is taller when sitting than when standing?" A dog.]* and on the other hand, **punning riddles** or conundrums, which are a form of humor--the response being, "I give up." *["What's the difference between an engineer and a teacher?" One minds the train and the other trains the mind.]*

A joke is a short humorous story, usually with a punch line. The humor of jokes can be based on **the situation**. *[As in the story of a boy walking down the road who saw an old man on his porch playing checkers with his dog. "That dog must be pretty smart," said the boy. "Nah, he ain't that smart," replied the man, "I just beat him three out of four games."]* Or their humor may come from **the language**. *[You know the one about the sailor with a wooden leg named Smith . . . and what was the other leg called?]*

Proverbs are referred to as "the wisdom of the people." Most proverbs are of unknown folk origin *"Let sleeping dogs lie,"* though some are taken from the most popular works of literature throughout history: the Bible, *"Money is the root of all evil,"* Shakespeare, *"Brevity is the soul of wit,"* Franklin, *"Honesty is the best policy."* A collection of one-liner literature and a complete popular philosophy is contained in English proverbs.

Our language is also full of proverbial similes: *[as nutty as a fruitcake, like a bull in a china shop, as clear as mud, etc.]* and folk sayings: *[It's raining cats and dogs; she's behind the eight ball; he hasn't got the brains God gave a goose, and so on.]*

People pick up their slang from the many social groups that they belong to at various times in their lives: teenagers and college students "*ditch school*", white-collar workers are called "*pencil pushers*", politicians "*pass the buck*", and sports fans talk of "*batting a thousand*". It is claimed that about 10 percent of our personal language is formed by slang, but it is the portion that is most frequently used. While some slang becomes generally accepted like "*O.K.*," most goes out of style fairly quickly: remember "*sock it to me*"?

Children's rhymes or "playground poetry" can be satirical, nonsensical, and topical; or they can serve a practical purpose, for example, jump-rope rhymes: *[Cinderella, dressed in yella/Went upstairs to kiss her fella./How many kisses did she get?/1,2,3,4,5 . . . (until the jumper misses)]*

Wordplay encompasses **verbal games**, *[Like the endless tale of the boy octopus and the girl octopus walking hand in hand in hand in hand ...]*, **tangletalk**, which are memory-taxing chants, **tongue twisters**, *[Black bug's blood, rubber baby buggy bumpers, and the 300 year-old classic: Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers . . .]*, and lastly **tricks or catches**. I've caught adult English teachers with, *["Which is correct: six and five <u>are</u> thirteen, or six and five <u>is</u> thirteen?"]*.

Folk speech activities include: collecting, sharing, and completing language exercises. With folk speech the emphasis is on tasks rather than presentation. Its

forms and uses are oral: joke-telling, riddling, rhyming, wordplay, etc., but there are also infinite possibilities for devising folk speech-related written activities that require relatively little preparation and provide the opportunity for learner choice of materials. Both as individual and group projects, folk speech is fully participatory especially because it affords the incomparable experience of folklore collecting, primarily in an ESL setting.

Folk Speech Activity Demonstration: Split Proverbs

1. *Pair up.*
2. *List as many English proverbs as possible from memory. (collecting phase, done by the teacher)*
3. *Split 10 of the proverbs at their natural break, and mix the second halves on a separate paper. (materials writing phase, also done by the teacher)*
4. *Exchange (or distribute).*
5. *Connect the halves to make sensible proverbs. (learner activity)*

This simple brief example shows the ease of devising written folk speech exercises. The learner while connecting/recreating the unfamiliar proverbs will use advanced reasoning skills, besides metaphorical language comprehension. Discussion will naturally follow and, undoubtedly, comparison with native language proverbs.

Folklore is motivating. It is stimulating, challenging, and entertaining. With folklore activites there are no failures. Learners experience the thrill of discovery and the desire to share the riddles, jokes, rhymes, songs, stories, etc., that they have learned, in other words--to communicate. Folklore goes home with learners. It forms a bond between students and teacher and between the students as a group. A story or song session is a time of feelings, of vulnerability, of sharing oneself. Folklore is relaxing. The anxiety barriers to language learning are broken down by the pleasure of performance, the physical release of singing and clapping and laughing, and the sense of emotional security that folklore gives. Folklore is satisfying; a deep sense of fulfillment and accomplishment remains after a tale, song, or speech activity. It may be in the affective realm that folklore has its strongest impact.

Although using folklore, in particular tales and songs, in language instruction is certainly not new (you probably remember songs from your foreign language lessons--though perhaps little else), much work still needs to be done to discover how far this relationship can be developed. A great need exists for coherent, sensitive, flexible, teacher-friendly, learner-centered, folklore-based English curriculum materials.

Folklore-Related Language Activities

Listen to folk tales or songs for key words and information to complete oral or written comprehension exercises and questions of the definition, semantic, synonym, antonym, homonym, and keyword types.

Listen to song, story, or spoken word recordings related to the topics of the songs and stories performed in class.

Use the language lab to listen to folk tales and songs in groups or individually.

Speak about a song or story, giving an oral summary or an oral report on its topic.

Recite or read in unison rhymes, songs, tongue twisters, wordplay, etc., for pronunciation practice. Recite folklore-related oral drills, or prepared dialogues from tales or songs.

Learn, tell, and explain jokes, riddles, and wordplay. Retell favorite tales and re-sing favorite songs.

Perform a song for another group after rehearsing and practicing. Record a song performance.

Discuss the humanities topics presented in a song or story: moral dilemmas, the relationships between the sexes, class struggle, attitudes towards work, racism, the environment, war, etc.

Discuss proverbs in their social, cultural, and historical backgrounds and the relevancy of their "truths".

Play oral story fill-in or guessing games, spelling bees, cooperative add-on stories, building a tale from key words, adding an ending to an interrupted story.

Dramatize, mime, act out a skit, do a mock interview, or role-play stories or songs. Perform them for other class; perform a song or rhyme with actions, movement or dance. Organize seasonal or holiday activities, like a dress-up day with food.

Invite folklore resource people to come interact with the class.

Read for comprehension and to locate specific information.

Read passages related the content of a song or story from poetry, juvenile literature, non-fiction, almanacs, etc.

Write, summarize, or paraphrase a song-text in prose as a story or write a story in song form or as a poem or play.

Dictate songs, rhymes, stories, etc. Translate a song or rhyme text retaining the poetical style and finding equivalent expressions for slang.

Complete vocabulary exercises or research related to a song or story: scrambled words, idiom definitions, spelling lists, word analogies, fill-in rhymes, etc.

Complete grammar exercises related to a story or song: mixed-order sentences, error detection, phonetic grouping, syllabizing, finding homonyms and antonyms, contraction practice, missing vowel words, crosswords, word-search puzzles,

subtract-a-word, acrostics, cloze proverbs, song or story texts, split and match proverbs, exploring L1 equivalents for proverbs.

Write a controlled or free essay on a song, proverb, or story topic.

Write a modern version of a folk tale; compare different versions of a folk song or tale. Write creative stories patterned after traditional stories. Write original lyrics to a song melody, either parodying or changing something in a song. Write an imaginary letter or diary, a character sketch, or a dialogue based on a folk tale or song.
Research a song or story topic; gather family histories, collect newspaper articles on folklore; compile a bibliography related to a folk theme.

Put together a class newsletter on folklore, make a class songbook, or compile a dictionary of slang.

Create artwork related to folklore: drawings illustrating a story, models, collages, crafts like building a folk instrument, puppets, photos, posters, masks, mobiles, blackboard drawing, etc.

Display works of art related to a song or story subject.

Do mapwork related to folklore.

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